

Best Practices in Managing the Classroom to Improve Student Commitment



Prepared by: MWB Education Consultants Inc.

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Section 2 A: Best Practices in Managing the Classroom to Improve Student Commitment

Approach: Classroom management in College LBS programs is affected by a number of conditions which are beyond the direct control of those in the classroom. While some of these conditions are listed in the best practices it is recognized that often little can be done to change them. Where pressure can be brought to bear by the program administration, the practitioner and/or the literacy participants, the best practices point that out.

The best practices are listed in three sections; each is organized under the area or individual having the greatest control of those practices. These sections are:

- institution controlled,
- practitioner controlled
- shared control.

Within each section the best practices are grouped under headings describing their commonalities.

This review largely assumes that the learners are the recipients of the best practices, rather than participants in the development of them. This is not completely true, however, as will be shown when such things as internal program control, communication and classroom ambience are discussed.

A. Institutional

Note: 'Institutional' refers to the college, the referring agencies, and the funders. Institutional controlled policies, while they appear on the surface to be inflexible are not necessarily so. From the Ministry directives to the college directives, individual programs have sought and gained approval for creative changes. Thus, while an initial response to the following 'best practices' might be to say, "We can't change that!" adoption of, or movement toward each has been achieved by creative programs in Ontario colleges

1. Policies:

a. Program Location: The college usually has responsibility for determining the location of the LBS program. There are many considerations taken into account when the program location is determined, involving transportation and availability of other services, including college services. The overriding concern for most colleges, however, is cost. LBS administrators and practitioners agree that an off-site location best serves the needs of their learners. It is, however, the learners themselves who make this point most strongly. They recognize that they have different needs from the post-secondary students and the need to develop their self-confidence before mixing with this larger group.

A **best practice** with respect to location:

The location of LBS classes should reflect the particular characteristics of the class. Having LBS off site in a central location best recognizes these particular characteristics: proximity to referring agencies, academic counselling as part of the process rather than a function of an independent department, the fragility of many learners coming back to school.

The reality of LBS funding and College priorities, however, mean that for many programs a central off-site location is not possible. Where this has been the case, College-based LBS programs have identified characteristics which they feel should be in place when an on-site location is selected.

A best practice in the selection or modification of an on-site location:

A College on-site location should be chosen recognizing the particular characteristics of the LBS learner. Among the physical considerations should be a separate entrance, a common space reserved for LBS learners and an area for support personnel dedicated to the LBS program.

Approach: If an off-site location is desired it is necessary to convince the college policymakers of this by emphasizing the special nature of the program and its participants. Statistically this is relatively easy to do through studies on adults returning to school, their dropout reasons and their own stories of success. Evidence

of the advantages of physical separation from other types of learners is given in the article by Grace Malicky and Charles Norman, *Perceptions of Adult Literacy Learners about Themselves and Their Lives*.

b. Physical Program Space: A discussion of physical space may seem irrelevant to the topic of classroom management. In discussions with both practitioners and learners, however, the issue of physical space invariably arose with respect to the process and speed of achieving course and program outcomes. LBS budgets are, of course, the most significant factor in determining not only the location of the program, but also the amount of physical space available to the program. It is, however, the program people themselves, along with the learners, who determine how that available space is used. More on this topic will be covered in the next two sections. In this section a best practice around the quantity of space that should be available to an LBS program is appropriate.

A **best practice** with respect to physical program space:

Every LBS class should be allocated enough physical space to enable a variety of functions from lecture, to group discussion, to learning circles, to quiet individual study and confidential consultation to take place.

Approach: At the advent of an LBS class in a new location, it is vital that those who will be affected, the practitioners and the learners, along with the program administrator(s) be consulted around physical space.

2. Procedures

a. Intake Pattern: Because it is generally accepted that block intakes maximize participant learning the college should make every effort to effect the block intake pattern. Beder and Medina, in *Classroom Dynamics in Adult Literacy Education*, found that continuous intake classes made slower progress and had a higher drop-out rate than did block intake classes.

A best practice with respect to intake:

College LBS programs should recognize the block intake as ideal and move towards this where possible by adding new learners to the class as infrequently as possible.

Approach: Since the main deterrent to block intakes is the need to keep a certain number of learners in the class, there are a number of best practices that are under the control of the practitioner and the learners which have a direct bearing on learner attendance, and thus on the ability of a program to maintain a relatively stable class over an extended period.

b. Attendance: While there is an expectation around attendance mandated by the funder, there are usually attendance guidelines or expectations that are prescribed by the College. It is the latter which can and should be influenced by the special situation of the adult literacy learner. Most colleges, in their response to a questionnaire, indicated that they developed attendance policies appropriate to their LBS programs.

A **best practice** with respect to attendance:

Attendance policies in LBS programs should reflect the peculiar circumstances of each LBS learner.

Approach: If attendance policies are created to encourage participation they will reflect the individual situations of the learners. It is during the initial goal-setting meeting with the learner that attendance, linked to achievement and particular circumstances should be worked out and agreed to.

c. Discipline: Discipline in the classroom would normally be seen to be a concern to be controlled within the classroom. However, institutional policies have a lot to do with this classroom management concern. All colleges have policies, usually published in student handbooks, which outline appropriate behaviour in the classroom. These classroom behaviour guidelines tend to concentrate on the inappropriateness of disruptive behaviour, because it impinges on the learning of others. Such a guideline is appropriate to LBS classes as well.

A best practice with respect to the general topic of discipline:

The LBS learner's behaviour in the classroom should not, in any way, interfere with the learning of others.

Approach: There is little debate concerning the advantages of all participants in the classroom setting, including practitioners and support personnel beginning their relationship with the understanding that all are adults and deserve to be treated as

such in all interactions. There will be more discussion on this issue in both the practitioner controlled section and the shared control section.

Discipline policies invariably involve consequences. Colleges generally have consequences for inappropriate discipline spelled out in student handbooks. The application of these consequences should take the unique nature of LBS learners into account, as evidenced by the number of college LBS administrators reporting that they had discipline policies peculiar to their LBS programs. There may be policies of the referral agency or the funding agency which override college policy. The circumstances of the learner may dictate a different consequence than that proscribed by the college. Once again, action taken with respect to the adult LBS learner returning to school should be, if possible, based on the individual situation. There will be more discussion on this issue in both the practitioner controlled and the shared control sections.

A **best practice** with respect to discipline consequences:

Wherever possible the consequences of concerns over discipline in the LBS classroom should recognize the circumstances of the individual.

d. Student Evaluation: Evaluation of progress in LBS serves a number of purposes. It may simply indicate to the learner her/his success; it may justify the referring agency's action in allowing the learner to attend; it may validate the program in the eyes of the funder. In all of these cases it is differentiated from the general college policies on evaluation. While some best practices on evaluation may apply to all college students, there are some which have a special application to LBS learners. With respect to classroom management, ongoing evaluation of learner success promotes an enthusiastic response to new learning challenges and, consequently, a classroom where optimum learning is taking place. College LBS administrators indicated, in response to a questionnaire, that they have progress evaluations as frequently as every two weeks.

Normative evaluation, that which is carried out to demonstrate to the learner and the practitioner what learning has taken place and where additional learning is needed, has a special place in LBS. For the learner who has been away from structured learning of any kind for a period of time frequent positive reinforcement is vital.

Summative evaluation, that which determines completion of a unit of study, is equally important in that it identifies milestones achieved. While summative evaluation may take place at the end of a semester in many college programs, it should take place at the end of each unit as agreed to by the learner and the practitioner at intake.

A **best practice** with respect to evaluation:

Frequent evaluation of the learner's progress, both normative and summative should be recognized as a vital part of every LBS program.

B. Practitioner

Note: This term refers to the individual whose responsibility it is to assist the learners in the completion of the outcomes outlined in their individual training plans. This individual could be a college professor, a technologist, a support services officer or other employee who takes on this function.

1. Learning Approaches

a. Managing learning: The function of the practitioner is to manage the learning in the classroom. This function is central to the concept of ‘classroom management’. Good classroom management relies more on the approach the practitioner takes to managing learning than on the sum of all the other considerations in classroom management. There are many aspects to managing learning, not all of which are the responsibility of the practitioner. Some, such as the outcomes associated with self-management and self-direction which begin as the responsibility of the practitioner move to the learner. Others, such as goal identification, may largely take place outside the LBS classroom altogether.

Among the multitude of ‘best practices’ referring to the managing of learning there are two which stand over all others and of which all others should be a part:

The management of learning should lead to the development and reinforcement of the learner’s control of his/her own learning.

The management of learning should strive to build a shared power relationship in the classroom that contributes to self-esteem and self-confidence.

To assist the learner in gaining control of his/her own learning it is essential that the practitioner assist the learner in determining how learning takes place most effectively for that individual. Miller and Joy in *Learning and Talking Together: Research Investigating Persistence and Retention in Adult Literacy Programs* find learning style identification as the primary need for effective learning strategy

development. This 'learning style identification' leads to a **best practice**:

Because taking control of learning depends on each individual's understanding of his/her learning style, the practitioner should assist the individual in identifying that style and utilizing it in managing the learning of that individual.

Approach: There are a number of approaches to learning style identification available for programs. The one recommended by the colleges' Adult Literacy Educator is derived from Human Dynamics and is directed at education.

b. Instructional approaches: An important aspect of managing the learning of the class is the choice of instructional approach used by the practitioner. This choice not only determines the success of the learner in reaching learning outcomes successfully, but can be seen as an essential part of classroom management. Every good adult literacy practitioner has a variety of instructional approaches to offer variety and maintain interest in the literacy classroom. Two articles from *Focus on Basics*, Barbara McDonald's *The Impact of Content-Based Instruction*, and Wrigley, Sprunk and Heide's *Knowledge in Action: The Promise of Content-Based Learning*, provide a sample of the many practitioners who encourage experimentation in instructional approaches. Tying these instructional approaches to the self-management of and personal empowerment in learning, however, requires the practitioner to be cognizant of the learning styles of each learner and choose instructional approaches in line with the learner's style. A best practice related to instructional approaches:

The selection of instructional approaches in the LBS classroom should be made based on the individual learning style of the learner and recognize the degree of learning self-management which the learner has achieved.

Approach: Only the grouping of learners according to predominant learning styles makes such a practice possible. Large and small groups, pairs, and individual study recognize different learning styles and facilitate the application of appropriate instructional approaches.

2. Classroom procedures

Application of standards: One of the recurring themes of classroom management of both practitioners and learners is the need for the practitioner to be clear in the expression and consistent in the application of expectations around learners' rights and responsibilities, confidentiality of information and behaviour and performance. While it is ideally a shared responsibility to develop these expectations, it is the practitioner who is expected to see that they are carried out. This uniformity does not negate the importance of seeing adult learners in the classroom as individuals; rather it offers an up-front approach to everyone's recognition of each learner's unique situation and an opportunity to develop the understanding necessary for learning success on the part of every member of the class.

A **best practice** around application of standards:

Expectations around rights and responsibilities of all participants in the LBS classroom should be clearly articulated and uniformly demanded.

Approach: The importance of this 'best practice' was identified by most LBS administrators through the survey. In *Helping Adults Persist: Four Supports*, Comings et al see this as part of one of the four main goals that every program must strive to achieve. The clear posting of agreed-upon rights and responsibilities and expectations around performance and behaviour makes a uniform application more visible and defensible. The continued review of these rights, responsibilities and expectation through focus group meetings, 'town hall' meetings or other inclusive means will keep them relevant and known by everyone in the class.

3. Communication

a. Communication in instruction: Communication between practitioner and learner, is a vital part of the power relationship and central to management in the classroom. Johnson-Bailey and Cervero in *Beyond Facilitation in Adult Education: Power Dynamics in Teaching and Learning Practices*, identify the extent to which these power dynamics impact learning. This study shows that everything from tone of voice to voice level affects this power relationship. Pat Campbell, in *Participatory Literacy Practices: Exploring Social Identity and Relations*, demonstrates that it is

through this communication that power is shared between learners and practitioner. If the type and amount of communication that occurs between practitioner and learner leads to this shared power arrangement and is predicated on the learning style of the learner, it acts as a motivator toward the successful completion of learning outcomes and contributes to the feeling of satisfaction in the process that the learner experiences.

A **best practice** tied to communication in instruction:

Through communication in instruction the practitioner should balance the power arrangements in the classroom and access each learner's individual learning style.

Approach: Power resides with the practitioner any time a new block of students is introduced or a new individual joins the class. Because the sharing of power is vital to the transmission of control of learning to the learner, every verbal contact with the learner affects that power relationship. If that is understood by the practitioner communication will be used to further that transmission through recognition of learning style, through appropriate praise and censure.

b. Communication in learning: LBS practitioners' focus groups tended to look at communication between learners quite differently than did the learners' focus groups. Practitioners, while they didn't tie it directly to learning style (probably because of a lack of opportunity in the focus group) discussed the value of different physical space arrangements to allow for small group discussions, pair interaction and other learner communication opportunities. The learner focus groups did speak of learning style when talking of the need to have communication opportunities with their fellow learners. Michael Priza, in *Getting into Groups* speaks of the need to encourage learners to share information in group settings. In fact, he finds a positive correlation between group activity and learner retention.

A **best practice** around communication in learning:

LBS facilitators should maximize learning through learner-to-learner communication appropriate to each learner's style of learning.

Approach: Once the different learning styles of the class are identified, learner-to-learner communication can be facilitated through reordering the classroom set-up and

encouraging social-emotional learners to interact with one another as an approach to learning.

One of the concerns around communication in learning that all practitioners experience is investigated by Johnson-Bailey and Cervero in *Beyond Facilitation in Adult Education: Power Dynamics in Teaching and Learning Practices*. They discuss concerns around the learner who dominates discussion whether it is in small groups or in the whole class setting. Focus groups of practitioners also identified this as a concern in group discussion situations. This is clearly one of those ‘discipline’ situations that every adult literacy practitioner faces. Successful approaches to dealing with this situation involve a recognition of and challenging the individual who tries to dominate to express the learning that s/he wants to demonstrate in acceptable form, such as further research leading to a ‘learned’ review.

A **best practice** around learner domination:

The learner who tends to dominate discussion should be challenged to demonstrate that learning in a way that will be of value in achieving the outcomes that s/he has identified.

4. Classroom Control

a. Positive Disruption: The disruption caused by the dominant learner who wants to speak on every topic is probably a positive disruption. This term refers to a disruption of the learning process of others by one or more individuals whose actions, while directly tied to achieving their identified learning outcomes, are disruptive to others’ achieving their learning outcomes. Practitioner and learner focus groups identified this person as an issue in classroom management. Both groups also recognized the need to stop the disruption without censuring the individual. A best practice tied to positive disruption:

As in 3c above, the learner(s) causing the positive disruption should be encouraged, through alternative learning assignments, to channel that energy toward achieving their identified outcomes.

Approach: If the positive disruption is a single learner, that individual can be removed from the disruptive situation by individual assignment to be completed outside the classroom. If the positive disruption involves more than one, a project

demanding cooperation and collaboration might achieve learning outcomes for both and remove the disruptive influence in the classroom.

b. Negative disruption: With respect to the individual who causes a disruption in a manner that is negative to the learning process (e.g. won't stop talking about something completely unrelated to the topic), the practitioner focus groups referred to the importance of the statement of learners' rights and responsibilities as the authority needed to take action. Learner focus groups, while not as quick to identify the statement of rights and responsibilities, also stressed the need for some method of stopping the negative disruption.

A **best practice** to deal with negative disruption:

Clearly outlined and understood expectations around the learners' rights and responsibilities should be uniformly invoked to deal with negative disruption.

C. Shared: Practitioner and Learners

There are a number of aspects of classroom management where there is, or can be, a shared responsibility between the practitioner and the learners. Whether or not this responsibility is shared is largely determined by the practitioner. A number of the studies cited in the accompanying bibliography speak of the importance of participants' sharing in the management of their classroom and thus in the approach to their learning. Juliet Merrifield, in *Performance Accountability: For Whom? To Whom? And How?* speaks of the need for learners to be able to effect change in other ways than simply dropping out. Pat Campbell in *Participatory Literacy Practices: Exploring Social Identity and Relations*, writes of the need for the understanding and sharing of power between the facilitator and the learners in an ideal class.

1. Class mission statement

While the term 'mission statement' may sound somewhat inflated for this best practice, it is the best way to outline an underlying philosophy that assures power sharing in the LBS classroom. Not only the bibliographic research, but the practitioners' focus groups and responses to the questionnaire on practices identified the need for all actions in the classroom to be guided by such a mission statement.

A **best practice** on a mission statement:

There should be an operating philosophy within the classroom that affirms the right of learners to have a say in policies and actions which affect their lives.

Approach: The framing and hanging of the statement in a conspicuous place is important. The development of this 'mission statement' is under regular discussion in some programs where continuous intake is in effect. In fixed intake situations it can be reviewed with each new intake.

2. Participation in decision-making

Among others in the bibliography, Greg Hart, in *Power, Literacy and Motivation*, speaks of the need to have learners involved in decision-making, not just around their lives, but around class decisions as well. To Hart this power sharing in the classroom presages the taking control of learning and the development of self-confidence in the

learner. Facilitators' focus groups offered approaches. They stressed the value of 'town hall' meetings, student newspapers and suggestion boxes as means of getting participants' involvement. They pointed out the need to guarantee a timely response to any query the learners had.

A **best practice** concerning participation in decision-making:

Clearly-defined and available opportunities for learner input into all decisions which affect them, over which the LBS program has control, should be regularly made available to participants.

Approach: Once again, it is the involvement of the learners at every step that makes this practice of value to the well-managed classroom.

Please note! The sources referred to in this report can be found in the annotated bibliography which follows.

Section 2 B: An Annotated Bibliography

This annotated bibliography is intended to offer synopses of articles and discussions relevant to the issue of classroom management in adult literacy classes. Little has been written on the issue of classroom management itself. However, there is a wealth of material on issues of student retention, motivation and success, all of which impinge on classroom management. Empowerment, motivation, persistence and participation, the benefits of group work, content and project-based instruction all affect the nature of the learning environment. It is this learning environment in total which must be examined if one is to understand why some classes of adult literacy learners function successfully while others expend most of their energy on student retention.

The research for this bibliography has been done mainly on the Internet and all the sites are indicated in order to facilitate access and encourage consultation of these pertinent articles. Only two of the articles were written more than ten years ago and these two are Canadian based and are still relevant to Ontario adult literacy classes today. Many are from *Focus on Basics*, an American publication that offers many articles relevant to the special issues that relate to adult literacy education.

While it would have been possible to list the articles and discussions according to their primary interest, to do so may have encouraged readers to concentrate on only a couple of the articles. Since many of them go far beyond the description offered and all say a great deal about many of the issues that face adult literacy practitioners, it was determined to simply list them alphabetically and let the reader discover some of the hidden wealth that goes beyond the given description.

Beder, Hal & Medina, Patsy. (2001). *Classroom Dynamics in Adult Literacy*
<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ncsall/research/report18.pdf>

The purpose of this report is to provide a detailed and comprehensive analytical description of classroom behaviours in adult literacy education. This is a must read for practitioners and policy makers interested in adult literacy, and is the only study since 1975 to address the issues of classroom behaviours. The study examines three basic questions that are critical to understanding the field: how is instruction delivered and in what is its content? what processes underlie teaching and learning?

what external forces shape classroom behaviour? Addressed are such classroom concerns as adult tardiness and tuning out. The authors note that adult education practitioners, unlike secondary and elementary teachers, let these unpleasant behaviours go unnoticed. According to this study, these behaviours stem from external forces such as fatigue and family and job pressures. However, this study does not address the classroom management issues that arise when adults are being mandated to take literacy courses. The present study sponsored by the Literacy Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the national Literacy Secretariat will shed some light on this new adult literacy classroom reality.

Belzer, Alisa (1998). *Stopping Out, Not Dropping Out. Focus on Basics*, 2 A
<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ncsall/fob/1998/belzer.htm>

In this article, Alisa Belzer, a project director of the Pennsylvania Adult Literacy Practitioner Inquiry Network (PALPIN), suggests that students and teachers may perceive withdrawing from a program differently. Students in this small scale study did not feel that they had failed when they stopped participating in a program. They simply felt that it was not possible to continue due to factors beyond their control, such as a job, health problems, financial and family problems etc. Because of this Belzer suggests that teachers and program managers plan their curriculum and assessment procedures on the assumption that “even under the best of circumstances students will come and go and hopefully, come again”.

Campbell, Pat. (1996). *Participatory Literacy Practices: Exploring Social Identity and Relations. Adult Basic Education*. 6, 3 p. 127-142.
<http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/pat/vol6no3/page127.htm>

Campbell, a consultant with Literacy Services of Canada, explains that participatory literacy programs are those which "share the power equally among learners and staff". The main purpose of this research is to study participatory literacy practices or the active involvement of students in the operation of one or more components of their adult literacy program. The interaction between social identity and power relationships are examined and then applied to the following research questions: (a) What are the individual and group experiences of students and literacy workers who are involved in participatory literacy practices? (b) What changes do students and

literacy workers see in themselves and in their programs as they become involved in participatory literacy practices?

Comings, John. Parrella, Andrea. & Soricone, Lisa. (2000) *Helping Adults Persist: Four Supports*. Focus on Basics 4 A.

<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ncsall/fob/2000/comings.html>

The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy is conducting a study on learner persistence. When the third phase is completed in 2006, NCSALL will be able to provide research-tested advice to programs and policy makers on how to help adult students persist in learning. In the meantime, Comings et al. have identified four supports to persistence. The first support is awareness and management of the positive and negative forces that help and hinder persistence. The second is self-efficacy. The third support is the establishment of a goal by the student and the final one is progress toward reaching a goal.

Empowering Students. (2002). ABEB Conference Prince George, BC.

<http://www.nald.ca/PROVINCE/BC/abe/empower/empower.pdf>

This inspiring and insightful speech given at an ABE conference in British Columbia describes some basic principles that promote learners' confidence and increase their feeling of empowerment. An empowered learner is a motivated learner. The unnamed speaker points out that the developmental conditions that lead to feelings of empowerment include "emotional nurturance, respect, real challenges to students' thinking and opportunities for risk taking in learning without penalty of failure". The speaker feels that teachers play a pivotal role in empowering students: "I would never underestimate the power of a teacher to breathe new life into students and to empower them for the rest of their lives".

Giese, Marti. (2000). *Look Before You Leap: Helping prospective learners make informed educational choices*. Focus on Basics 4 A.

<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ncsall/fob/2000/giese.html>

Giese, a literacy practitioner in Virginia, has noticed that mismatches often occur between adult learners and the programs they choose to enrol in. As a result, learners lose motivation and often drop out. She believes that adult learners need to become

more active in their decision making about their education. In this article she describes the results of a small-scale project where adult learners were put into groups and allowed to discover the information they needed to make a more informed decision.

The results of the study confirmed her hypothesis that more informed decisions about the future and decisions which were much more likely to be worked toward were made in a group setting.

Jonik, Mary & Goforth, Dee. (2001). *What Works: Recruitment and Retention of Ontario Works Clients*. Literacy and Basic Skills College Sector Committee.

The purpose of this report funded by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the National Literacy Secretariat was to suggest approaches to improving the overall participation and commitment of clients in Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) college programs. The report presents three strategies that show strong potential for improving retention rates of ‘at-risk’ learners. The three strategies are:

1. **Learning Alert:** A Learning Disabilities Quick Screen
2. **Learners Helping Learners:** Setting Up Focus Groups for Learners
3. **Screening for Success:** A Self Management/Self-Direction Quick Screen

Goforth, Dee & Jonik, Mary. (2002) *Retention through Redirection*. Literacy and basic Skills College Sector Committee.

This follow-up report to *What Works*, explains 7 features of retaining and redirecting adult learners. The report identifies effective means for identifying at-risk learners and an effective process for helping learners set realistic goals. The first feature outlines an effective approach for identifying learners at risk. This is followed by an approach to the setting of realistic career and employment goals. Feature 3 of the report sets out policies that establish expectations for attendance. Feature 4 presents a systematic process for reviewing learners’ goals, progress, attendance and barriers. The next feature identifies strategies to help learners recognize and manage the forces that influence their persistence. Feature 6 talks about the need for students to have

access to personal, career and academic counselling. Finally, Feature 7 discusses the different types of redirection options available for learners.

Hart, Greg. (1998). *Power, Literacy and Motivation. Focus on Basics, 2 A*
<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ncsall/fob/1998/hart.htm>

Hart sees literacy as a means to greater power and personal freedom. He states “it is the prospect of achieving power and not the concept of literacy that truly motivates both students and teachers”. As a result, Hart and his colleagues at Pima County Adult Education (PCAE) decided to invest time, energy and money to introduce the potential for power and civic engagement in an integrated way into their curriculum. Hart explains that they did this in order to motivate students to “use and respect literacy as a tool of action rather than to regard it as a concept unrelated to the reality of their lives and their powerlessness”. Power is the ultimate motivator. It allows the student to feel in control and confident in their decisions. This feeling of power will also motivate students to prioritize their engagement in the program.

Johnson-Bailey, Juanita & Cervero, Ronald. (1997). *Beyond facilitation in adult education: power dynamics in teaching and learning practices*. 27th Annual SCUTREA conference. <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/000000248.htm>

The authors of this article challenge the accepted notion that the ideal role for an adult educator is that of facilitator. They state “if all learners are to thrive, adult educators must go beyond the facilitator’s role to directly negotiate the power dynamics in the classroom”. The qualitative comparative case study found that power dynamics had a direct impact on students’ learning. In some cases these dynamics negated the learning while in other cases it empowered students to learn more. Students also reported being negatively impacted in the learning environment when a student dominated the class discourse and the teacher did not interfere.

Malicky, Grace. & Norman, Charles. (1996). *Perceptions of Adult Literacy Learners about Themselves and their Lives*. Adult Basic Education. 6, 1 p. 3-20.
<http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/pat/vol6no1/page3a.htm>

The primary purpose of the 3-year study reviewed in this paper was to understand the lives of participants in adult literacy programs in a large urban centre in Canada from

the perspectives of the program participants themselves. A second purpose involved asking them about perceived changes within themselves and in their lives as they participated in literacy programs. This is a very interesting study to read for practitioners and policy makers interested in classroom management because it clearly demonstrates that the more we know about the adults in the literacy programs, the more the programs can reflect their needs and the subjective realities of their lives.

McDonald, Barbara. (1997). *The Impact of Content-Based Instruction: Three Studies. Focus on Basics 1 D.*

<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ncsall/fob/1997/mcdonald.htm>

The data from these three studies lend support to the theory that content-based instruction can lead to gains in general literacy skills as well as job related skills. By combining general basic skills classes with specific content, instructional time can be reduced and learner motivation can be increased.

Merrifield, Juliet. (1999). *Performance Accountability: For Whom? To Whom? And How? Focus on Basics 3 B.*

<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ncsall/fob/1999/Merrifield.htm>

In this article Merrifield identifies the need in adult basic education to develop a system of mutual accountability. She states that mutual accountability ‘would engage members of the organization in creating a common vision, determining goals and customer expectations’. Every member would be both accountable to others and held accountable by them. This means that students would hold teachers accountable for providing learning opportunities that meet their needs. Programs should therefore hold learners accountable for taking learning seriously and for making an effort to participate fully. However, Merrifield correctly points out that the ‘learners cannot become real stakeholders in mutual accountability until they have other ways to effect change beyond dropping out’. Learners need to feel that they have the real power to make choices.

Miller, Robin & So, Joy. (1999). *Learning and Talking Together: Research Investigating Persistence and Retention in Adult Literacy Programs.*

<http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/journeys/cohort.htm>

Miller and So investigate what adult literacy programs can do to promote student persistence and retention. The recommendations that come from this study are the following:

- Provide opportunities for regular small group discussions
- Develop a range of discussion topics of interest to students
- Focus on learning strategies and study skills
- Provide support to becoming a student
- Use the discussion group to informally evaluate the program

Pritza, Michael (1998). *Getting into Groups. Focus on Basics, 2A.*

<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ncsall/fob/1998/pritza.htm>

Pritza, an instructor at the Gilmer County Adult Learning Center in Georgia, has found that by incorporating group classes and discussions into the curriculum “the classes are fuller and the students actually make time to include them in their daily schedule”. Discussion groups tend to generate energy and enthusiasm in the students leading to greater participation and time spent in the program.

Quigley, Allan. (1998). *The First Three Weeks: A Critical Time for Motivation. Focus on Basics, 2 A.*

<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ncsall/fob/1998/quigley.htm>

The first three weeks of a program are the “critical drop-out weeks”. Quigley suggests that programs need to identify those students least likely to stay in a program very early on and offer them extra support. These ‘at risk’ students should meet with an intake person (someone other than the teacher) at least once a week to go over their progress. Also, he suggests that groups within the classroom can be formed to create a smaller peer support group for the ‘at-risk’. If these “at-risk” students feel supported by their peers and program staff they will be more likely to participate fully in the classroom activities, will be more successful and will stay longer in the program.

Taylor, Maurice. (1985). *Locus of Control and Completion in an Adult Retraining Program*. 4th Annual Conference of the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education, Montreal, Quebec. conference report.

<http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/report4/rep31-35/rep33-01.htm>

In this study, Maurice hypothesizes that, “Those adult learners who complete a BTSD (Basic Training for Skill Development) program are more internally controlled than those adults who do not complete the program”. In other words he attempts to prove that internal motivation has a more powerful influence on success and perseverance than external factors. If this is true adult education practitioners need to find ways to help students get in touch with their internal motivation for wanting to learn and partake in literacy courses.

Thomas, Audrey. (1990). **The Reluctant Learner: A Research Report on Non-participation and Dropout in Literacy Programs in British Columbia**. Adult Basic Education.

<http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/athomas/rellea/insidcov.htm>

The aim of this project is to explore reasons for non-participation in ABE Literacy programs and reasons for dropout from such programs in British Columbia. The author describes 14 major findings in this in-depth and thorough study. The two findings that have a direct impact on classroom management issues are: 1) Adult learners stressed the importance of peer counselling and tutoring and requested more help with the transitions from one program to another. 2) People in this target population have often experienced chaotic lives. It is only when everything falls into place and the necessary supports are available that there is a reasonable chance of adults succeeding in their goals. If supports are not in place, the less motivated and curiosity-seekers soon drop out.

Wrigley, Sprunk, Heide. (1998) *Knowledge in Action: The Promise of Project-Based Learning. Focus on Basics 2, D*.

<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ncsall/fob/1998/wrigley.htm>

This article discusses the benefits of project-based learning for adult literacy students. In interviews done with teachers involved in successful project-based learning, the author found that learner motivation, interest and enthusiasm are increased because they are involved with a project of their choosing that interests them. As learners get

involved in the inquiry process, they become curious about answers, often digging deeper into a topic and spending more time on a task than they do when a teacher assigns group work. Project-based learning could be a way to motivate Ontario Works students and keep them coming to class.